

Chronology of the Acts and Pauline Epistles

I. Introduction

Unlike many parts of the Old Testament, which frequently contain a framework of genealogical material and references to dated events, the New Testament is not built upon an exact chronological structure. Its time elements must be determined largely from incidental references to known events in secular history, and from the mention of occasional time periods. The following survey of available evidence is brief rather than exhaustive.

II. Secular Historical Data

There are several historical events mentioned in the Acts and Pauline Epistles that aid in establishing a chronology. However, since almost all of these defy exact dating, any chronological scheme built upon them must remain only approximate. These events are the following: the rulership of Aretas in Damascus, the death of Herod Agrippa I, the famine in Palestine during the reign of Claudius, the proconsulship of Gallio in Achaia, and the accession of Festus as procurator in Palestine. Besides these occurrences, which are all mentioned in the New Testament, there are also certain happenings during the reign of Nero, which, though not referred to in the Acts or the epistles, nevertheless may have some bearing on New Testament chronology.

Rulership of Aretas in Damascus.—In 2 Cor. 11:32 Paul indicates that at the time of his escape from Damascus (see Acts 9:25) Aretas ruled Damascus, or at least the Nabataeans there, through an ethnarch, or deputy. Aretas IV was king of the Nabataeans from about 9 B.C. to about A.D. 40. However, evidence from coins indicates that Damascus was under Roman rule during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, so Aretas could scarcely have had authority there before the death of Tiberius in A.D. 37. Consequently the dates of Aretas' rule in Damascus are probably A.D. 37 to 40. Thus Paul's escape doubtless occurred during that time.

Death of Herod Agrippa I.—Acts 12:1–23 apparently places the death of James the son of Zebedee and the imprisonment of Peter immediately before the death of Herod Agrippa I. Agrippa succeeded to the territories of Philip the tetrarch shortly after Caligula became emperor in A.D. 37 (Josephus *Antiquities* xviii. 6. 10; *War* ii. 9. 6 [18]). Shortly before his death, in January, A.D. 41, Caligula added Galilee to Agrippa's territories (*Antiquities* xviii. 7. 2), and soon after the accession of the next emperor, Claudius, Agrippa received Judea as well (*ibid.* xix. 5. 1; *War* ii. 11. 5 [215]). Josephus (*Antiquities* xix. 8. 2) declares that Agrippa ruled over Judea for three years, and that he was completing the seventh year of his reign at the time of his death. This places the death of Agrippa in A.D. 44. Acts 12:3, 19 indicates that it occurred about Passover time, and so in the spring. See Palestine Under the Herodians.

Famine in Palestine.—Acts 11:28 records that Agabus, a prophet at Antioch, foretold a famine in Palestine that occurred during the reign of Claudius (A.D. 41–54). In response to his prophecy, Saul and Barnabas were sent by the church at Antioch to take an offering to the Christians of Judea (vs. 29, 30). Josephus records a famine in Palestine during the procuratorships of Fadus and Alexander (*Antiquities* xx. 5. 2; cf. *ibid.* 2. 5) that most probably is to be identified with the famine mentioned in Acts. Inasmuch as Fadus was put in charge of Judea in place of Agrippa I, who died in A.D. 44, it is reasonable to date the beginning of his rule in that year. The exact date of the end of Fadus' procuratorship and the coming of his successor, Alexander, cannot be ascertained.

However, Josephus (*ibid.* 5. 2), in recording the death of Herod of Chalcis as occurring in the 8th year of Claudius (probably fall of A.D. 47 to fall of A.D. 48; cf. Mishnah *Rosh Hashanah* 1. 1; Soncino ed. of the Talmud, p. 1), also indicates that this event happened during the procuratorship of Cumanus, who was successor to Alexander. Consequently, Alexander's term must have lasted no longer than A.D. 48. Therefore it appears safe to conclude that the famine mentioned in Acts 11 occurred sometime between A.D. 44 and 48, and since it fell in the periods of both procurators, it appears more than likely that it came earlier rather than later during this period.

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Expulsion of Jews From Rome.—When Paul reached Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey, he found there Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish couple who had recently left Rome when Claudius expelled the Jews from that city (see Acts 18:1, 2). The only ancient writer who mentions a date for this event is the 5th-century historian Orosius (*History* vii. 6. 15). He gives Josephus as his source for placing Claudius' expulsion of the Jews in that emperor's ninth year (A.D. 48–49). Although no extant text of Josephus records this, there is no reason to conclude that Orosius' statement is necessarily in error.

Gallio's Proconsulship in Achaia.—Sometime during Paul's stay at Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey, Gallio was proconsul of Achaia (see Acts 18:12). As contrasted with the procurators, who held office at the pleasure of the emperor, the proconsuls, who were appointed by the Roman Senate, normally governed only one year, although at times they might stay for two. Consequently, Gallio was probably not long in Achaia. A fragmentary inscription of Claudius from Delphi, in Achaia, refers to Gallio as proconsul; other inscriptions from the same reign help to fix the date as A.D. 51 or 52 (see Lake's chronological note in *The Beginnings of Christianity, Part I: The Acts of the Apostles*, edited by F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, vol. 5, pp. 460–464). Since proconsuls normally took office at the beginning of summer, it appears that Gallio was proconsul of Achaia either from the middle of A.D. 51 to the middle of A.D. 52, or from the middle of A.D. 52 to the middle of A.D. 53. If he was proconsul two years, his rulership might have covered this entire period.

Accession of Festus.—Acts 24:27 to 25:12 indicates that Paul's two-year imprisonment at Caesarea ended not long after Festus succeeded Felix as Roman procurator of Judea. Extant sources do not make possible an exact dating of this transfer of rulership. Its earliest possible date may be determined by the fact that two years before (ch. 24:27), when Paul was arrested at Jerusalem, the Egyptian insurrectionist with whom the apostle was confused had apparently but recently staged his revolt and escaped (see ch. 21:37, 38). Josephus states that this occurred during the rulership of Felix (*Antiquities* xx. 8. 6; *War* ii. 13. 5 [263]) and indicates that Nero was emperor at the time (*Antiquities* xx. 8. 4, 5). Since Nero succeeded to the throne in October, A.D. 54, Paul's arrest, which occurred at the time of Pentecost, could have been no earlier than the early summer of A.D. 55. His commitment to Rome consequently could have been, at the earliest,

¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ac 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

somewhat more than a year later (Luke's "two years," Acts 24:27; see Vol. II, pp. 136, 137), in the autumn of A.D. 56. As Festus had but recently arrived at that time, A.D. 56 apparently is the earliest possible date for his accession.

The latest possible date for the arrival of Festus is to be derived from the fact that Festus' successor, Albinus, was procurator at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles in the autumn of A.D. 62, "four years before the war" (Josephus *War* vi. 5. 3 [300]; Loeb ed., vol. 2, p. 463). Since it seems probable that Festus did not rule less than two years, the latest date that can reasonably be assigned for his accession is A.D. 60.

As between the two extremes, A.D. 56 and A.D. 60, for the change from Felix to Festus, a date toward the latter part of this period appears more likely. The appointment of Felix apparently was made sometime before Claudius died and was confirmed by Nero when he succeeded to the throne as emperor (A.D. 54; *ibid.* ii. 12. 8 [247]; 13. 2 [252, 253]). The fact that Paul, more than a year before the coming of Festus, had referred to Felix as having "been of many years a judge unto this nation" (Acts 24:10) indicates that his rule could hardly have ended much before A.D. 60. Therefore it appears safe to date the arrival of Festus in Palestine about A.D. 60.

III. Data From the New Testament

More than most writers in the New Testament, Luke, in the Acts, is conscious of the chronological framework of his narrative. Consequently, in addition to the events discussed above, which he synchronizes more or less with events of secular history, Luke also provides other time elements in his narrative that aid in the reconstruction of a chronology. In addition, Paul himself makes several incidental statements that give further information.

Paul first appears in the narrative of Acts at the time of the stoning of Stephen. There is no direct historical evidence for the date of Stephen's death. However, certain theological considerations suggest a date. The 70 weeks of Daniel's prophecy began in 457 B.C. (see on Dan. 9:25, and Vol. III, pp. 97–104), and ended in A.D. 34. This time period, according to the angel's statement to Daniel, was "determined upon thy people" (v. 24). It was a special period allotted to the Jews, after which, it is reasonable to assume, the Jews were no longer to be considered the chosen people of God. Of the events recorded in the Acts, the martyrdom of Stephen by the Sanhedrin is perhaps the most clearly representative of the Jews' official rejection of Christianity. Although the apostles continued thereafter to seek and to make Jewish converts, and although they did not go immediately to the Gentiles with the gospel, it was shortly after this event that Paul, the pre-eminent apostle to the Gentiles, was converted. Apparently about the same time Peter baptized the Roman centurion, Cornelius (Acts 10:44–48). All this seems to suggest the stoning of Stephen as dramatically signaling the end of the 70 weeks (see GC 328). On this basis A.D. 34 has been taken by this commentary as a working date for the stoning of Stephen. The conversion of Paul must have occurred soon afterward.

After his conversion, probably in A.D. 35, Paul remained at Damascus "many days" (ch. 9:23). Inasmuch as his next journey recorded in Acts was to Jerusalem after his escape from Damascus in a basket (Acts 9:25, 26; cf. 2 Cor. 11:32), his retreat to Arabia (see Gal. 1:17) must have occurred prior to this event, since at that time he had not yet visited Jerusalem after his conversion. His first visit to Jerusalem came "three years" after his conversion (Gal. 1:18), and so may be dated about A.D. 38. It was probably at that time that the vision recorded in Acts 22:17–21 occurred. Following his visit to Jerusalem

Paul went to Tarsus (see ch. 9:30). It was here that Barnabas found him some years later and invited him to assist in the work at Antioch. Paul remained a “whole year” (see ch. 11:25, 26) at Antioch. It was “in these days” that the prophet Agabus foretold the famine in Judea and the church of Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem with gifts (see vs. 27–30). “About that time” (see ch. 12:1; probably while Paul was at Antioch rather than after his visit to Jerusalem with Barnabas; see Additional Notes on Acts 12, Note 2) Herod killed James and imprisoned Peter (see vs. 1–3), and soon after died, in A.D. 44 (see p. 98).

At the end of his one-year stay at Antioch, about A.D. 44–45, Paul and Barnabas set out on the First Missionary Journey. How long this tour lasted is not known, but upon their return, Paul remained at Antioch a “long time” (see Acts 14:28). When dissension arose over Gentiles’ having been admitted to the church without circumcision, Paul, Barnabas, and others went to Jerusalem, where the problem was settled at a council with the apostles (ch. 15). This visit to Jerusalem appears most probably to be the same one that Paul mentions in Gal. 2:1 as having occurred “fourteen years after,” inasmuch as the issue in each case was circumcision (see Additional Note on Acts 15). However, the context does not indicate clearly the event from which these fourteen years are to be reckoned. They may be understood as beginning either with Paul’s conversion (Gal. 1:15, 16) or with his first visit to Jerusalem three years later (v. 18). Consequently, latitude must be allowed in dating the Jerusalem Council, but it may be placed tentatively about A.D. 49.

“Some days” (Acts 15:36) after Paul’s return to Antioch, he proposed the Second Missionary Journey to Barnabas, and when dissension arose between the two men, Paul set out with Silas. After preaching in Phrygia, Galatia, and Mysia, they came to Troas. Thence they sailed to Macedonia and preached at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Then Paul went to Athens, and after his experience on Mars’ Hill he settled at Corinth, where he remained “a year and six months” (ch. 18:11). Apparently during the latter part of this period, or possibly at the end of it, the uprising before the proconsul Gallio occurred, which has been dated above as sometimes between the summer of A.D. 51 and A.D. 53. “Paul after this tarried there yet a good while” (v. 18) and then set out for Palestine. In harmony with this evidence Paul’s return from the second journey may be dated tentatively about A.D. 52.

Before beginning his Third Missionary Journey, which lasted probably from A.D. 53 to 58, Paul again spent “some time” at Antioch (ch. 18:23). Then he traveled through Galatia and Phrygia and on to Ephesus, where he spent “three years” (ch. 20:31). Next he went through Macedonia to Greece, spending three months there (v. 3), and returned again through Macedonia about Passover time (spring) to Troas in Asia Minor, whence he sailed to Miletus and then to Palestine, arriving in late spring or early summer about the time of Pentecost, probably in A.D. 58. In Jerusalem Paul was attacked by a mob, imprisoned, and soon after taken to Caesarea, where he remained for “two years” (ch. 24:27) until Festus, soon after his arrival (c. A.D. 60, see p. 99), sent him to Rome to appear before Caesar. Paul and his party sailed in the autumn, but did not complete their journey before they were shipwrecked and forced to winter on the island of Melita (see chs. 27:12, 14–44; 28:1). “After three months” (ch. 28:11) they were able to continue their journey, and arrived in Rome probably early the following spring, A.D. 61. Here Paul was a prisoner some two years, which, in view of the fact that Luke gives this period

as “two whole years” (ch. 28:30), was probably somewhat more than two years and probably from A.D. 61–63.

At this point the record of Acts comes to an end, and further chronology can be constructed only conjecturally, on the basis of circumstantial evidence found in Paul’s later epistles. The two epistles, 1 Timothy and Titus, give a picture of Paul’s travels and his traveling companions that does not fit into the framework of the narrative of Acts (see Vol. V, pp. 183–185). Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that Paul was released after “two whole years” of imprisonment at Rome and that the travels recorded in these two epistles took place after that release. How long he was at liberty we cannot determine. If he was released in A.D. 63 he could have been away from the city during Nero’s persecution that followed the great fire in that city in July, A.D. 64. His travels during this period took him at least to Crete (Titus 1:5), and to Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3), probably to Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3) and Greece (2 Tim. 4:20), and perhaps to Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28; cf. the tradition recorded by Clement of Rome, that Paul reached the “limit of the west” [*The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 5 ANF, vol. 1, p. 6]). Apparently sometime during these travels Paul once more was arrested, perhaps at Troas (see 2 Tim. 4:13), and was taken to Rome. In 2 Tim. he is a prisoner there, and this time he expected to die soon (ch. 4:6). Conceivably his condemnation would not have occurred without another hearing before Nero, and as Nero left Rome in September, A.D. 66, for a visit to Greece, Paul’s trial may have occurred about that time. His death may reasonably be placed shortly afterward, perhaps in A.D. 67.

IV. Tentative Chronology of the Acts

A.D.

- 31 Crucifixion, Ascension, Pentecost (see Vol. V, pp. 251-254).
- 34 Stephen stoned; church persecuted; gospel carried to Samaria.
- 35 Paul converted.
- 35- Paul at Damascus and in Arabia.
- 38
- 38 Paul escapes from Damascus during reign of Aretas; visits Jerusalem “after three years” (Gal. 1:18); goes to Tarsus.
- 44 James the brother of John martyred; Peter imprisoned at Passover time; Agrippa dies.
- 44- Barnabas brings Paul to Antioch; Paul remains there “a whole year” (Acts 11:26=rAc 11:26).
- 45
- 45 Barnabas and Paul take famine relief to Jerusalem.
- 45- Paul’s First Missionary Journey; on return Paul remains at Antioch “no little time”
- 47 (Acts 14:28, RSV).
- 49 Jerusalem Council, “fourteen years after” (Gal. 2:1).
- 49 Paul begins Second Missionary Journey; preaches in Phrygia, Galatia, and enters Europe.
- 51 Paul arrives at Corinth, staying one and one-half years.
- 52 End of Second Missionary Journey; Paul “some time” at Antioch (Acts 18:23).
- 53- Paul’s Third Missionary Journey: travels through Asia Minor, stays three years
- 58 at Ephesus, travels through Macedonia, stays three months at Corinth.
- 58- Paul imprisoned at Caesarea “two years” (Acts 24:27); leaves in autumn.

- 60
60- Paul's journey to Rome, arriving in spring.
61
61- Paul a prisoner in Rome "two whole years" ([Acts 28:30](#)).
63
63- Paul travels in Crete, Asia Minor, Macedonia.
66
67 Death of Paul and Peter.

V. Tentative Chronology of Paul's Epistles

The chronology of Paul's ministry constitutes the basis for a chronological arrangement of his extant letters. An absolute chronology of Paul's life and ministry, however, cannot yet be worked out, because the underlying source material is either too fragmentary or ambiguous. Therefore more than one possible date may be suggested for most of the events in his life (see pp. 97–101). Consequently it is equally impossible to date definitely the writing of his various letters.

However, the margin of error with regard to the dates presented in this article cannot be great. While the true dates may lie a few years earlier or later than those suggested here, there can be no doubt that the dates presented herewith, which are based on all available source material, are very nearly correct. If chronological data should be discovered fixing definitely the dates of the administrations of Felix, Festus, or Sergius Paulus, it would be possible to place Paul's chronology on a firmer basis. As long as this cannot be done, any chronological scheme can be only tentative.

Therefore the scheme presented here makes no claim to finality on the chronology of Paul's letters, but it presents the results of an honest effort to find a solution for all available data, inspired and secular, Biblical and non-Biblical, that shed light on the subject under discussion. The epistles are examined in their presumed chronological order. (See also the Introduction to each).

1 Thessalonians.—This is Paul's first preserved epistle, but probably not his first letter to a church, because at that time he seems to have been known already as a letter writer. This is suggested by his warning against false epistles bearing his name, which may have been in circulation shortly afterward, at the time when the second letter to the Thessalonians was written (2 Thess. 2:2). The fact that at the same time Paul draws his reader's attention to his personal signature as a characteristic of "every epistle" (ch. 3:17) of his also suggests that forged letters were circulating among the churches under his name. Such letters could have had success only if Paul was already known as a man who frequently expressed his opinion in letters to various churches or individuals. It seems probable that a number of lost letters preceded 1 Thessalonians.

The church at Thessalonica, to which 1 Thessalonians was addressed, had been founded by Paul during his Second Missionary Journey (A.D. 49–52). Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia, was governed by seven politarchs under a prefect, and had a population of some 200,000. It is unknown how long Paul stayed there before disturbances incited by the Jews forced him to leave the city and continue his journey. His stay seems to have been rather short, as can be gathered from his desire to return to Thessalonica as soon as possible in order to complete work that he considered as needing his further attention. From Thessalonica Paul went first to Berea and then to Athens, leaving converts behind in each place when he departed. From Athens Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica, since he found himself unable to go (1 Thess. 2:17 to 3:6). By the time

Timothy returned with Silas, Paul had moved on to Corinth (Acts 18:5), where Timothy reported to him concerning the spiritual condition of the church at Thessalonica. Paul, realizing that certain misunderstanding concerning his teachings needed immediate attention there, wrote a letter known as 1 Thessalonians.

It seems, therefore, that 1 Thessalonians was written shortly after Paul's arrival in Corinth. According to the tentative chronology of Paul's ministry accepted in this commentary, this would be in A.D. 51 (see pp. 100, 102).

2 Thessalonians.—This letter cannot have been written much later than the first, because its contents are similar, and the same associates of Paul, Silas and Timothy, are mentioned at the beginning of the letter (2 Thess. 1:1; cf. 1 Thess. 1:1). This second letter was probably occasioned by the return from Thessalonica of the bearer of the first epistle, from whom Paul learned that his words concerning the imminence of the second advent were being misunderstood and misapplied by certain elements in the church. Therefore Paul gave to this new exposition of his teaching concerning the second coming of Christ a strongly prophetic tone, revealing to his readers that certain great events, especially the reign of Antichrist, would precede Christ's return.

These considerations are the basis for dating the second letter to the Thessalonians not long after the first, either in the last months of A.D. 51 or in the early months of A.D. 52, while Paul was busily engaged in building up the Christian church at Corinth, which his labor had brought into existence.

1 Corinthians.—This letter was written from Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8), where the apostle Paul labored some three years (A.D. 54–57) during his Third Missionary Journey (Acts 20:31; cf. AA 291). Earlier Paul had sent a letter to Corinth, in which he had admonished his readers to have no company with fornicators (1 Cor. 5:9). Hence, the so-called first epistle to the Corinthians is really the second letter addressed to that church. It was occasioned in the first place by reports received by Paul concerning certain deplorable conditions in Corinth (chs. 1:11; 5:1) that urgently required attention (chs. 1 to 6), and in the second place by a number of questions put before the apostle by the Corinthians (chs. 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). These required detailed answers.

The letter was written not long before the apostle's departure from Ephesus. Paul had planned to leave the city shortly after Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:8), but the outbreak of the riot described by Luke in Acts 19:23–41 apparently forced him to leave earlier. These historical circumstances alluded to in his letter make it possible to date the epistle in the spring of A.D. 57, on the eve of his departure from Ephesus. Whether it was sent in care of Titus is not certain, but possible.

2 Corinthians.—This letter can be dated easily, since it was written in Macedonia shortly after Paul had left Ephesus in A.D. 57. Inasmuch as Paul's earlier efforts to remedy the evils existing in that church had been without success (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:21), the apostle had decided to make another attempt at reconciliation through Titus, his young assistant in the ministry.

Titus had left Ephesus for Corinth probably in the early spring of A.D. 57, and may have carried the so-called first epistle to the Corinthians. At the departure of Titus, apparently the two men agreed that Titus, after having accomplished his task at Corinth, would proceed to Troas, where Paul planned to meet him (ch. 2:12, 13). Great was the disappointment of the apostle when, upon arriving at Troas, he learned that Titus had not yet arrived. Although he found good prospects for a successful work in Troas, he

continued his journey to Macedonia, and was much relieved to meet Titus in one of the Macedonian cities. The joy of meeting Titus was especially caused by the good report Paul received about the change of heart of the erring members at Corinth, who had not only gladly accepted Titus as Paul's representative, but had also accepted his message of rebuke, and had made wrongs right (ch. 7:5–7).

When Paul learned that Titus' tactful work had been successful above expectations, he requested the young man to return to Corinth and continue the good work already begun (ch. 8:16–18, 22–24), while Paul spent more time among the churches of Macedonia. Paul gave Titus another letter, our 2 Corinthians, in which he eloquently expressed his joy over the good reports he had received concerning the church of Corinth. He also announced to them his plan to come to Corinth after a short stay in Macedonia (chs. 12:14; 13:1). Therefore this letter can be dated probably in the summer of A.D. 57.

Galatians and Romans.—Scholars hold two views concerning the date of the Galatian letter. Most scholars believe that this letter was written during Paul's first visit to Corinth, at approximately the same time the two letters to the Thessalonians were written. This dating is based upon Paul's statement of surprise that the Galatians had "so soon" left his gospel in exchange for another (Gal. 1:6). In this epistle Paul apparently recounts his personal experiences only up to the time of the apostles' council at Jerusalem (see Gal. 1:15 to 2:10; Acts 15), which preceded his evangelization of Galatia on the Second Missionary Journey (Acts 16:6). Therefore those who hold this view conclude his reference to their having apostatized "so soon" implies that Paul was writing to them soon after his visit there on the second journey. Between his visit to the churches in Galatia during the initial part of his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 16:6) and his first stay in Corinth, probably less than two years elapsed, a period that he well might characterize as "soon." On the other hand, those who hold to a later date point out that the word "soon" in Gal. 1:6 cannot be construed as placing any definite limit on the time involved. The word "soon" might as well refer to a brief interval after his visit there on the third journey.

An alternate view places the writing of Galatians during Paul's three-month stay at Corinth on his Third Missionary Journey, about A.D. 58. This is based on the fact that the two letters, Galatians and Romans, are so much alike in subject matter as to make it seem likely that they were written at about the same time. Galatians was called forth by a doctrinal controversy that moved Paul's soul strongly. Romans presents an amplification of this same theme, and may therefore have been written soon after Galatians.

The cause for the writing of Galatians lay in the reported apostasy of the Christian churches in the province by that name. Under the influence of Judaizers, these Christians were seeking salvation by works (see p. 33). Paul was so shocked by the gravity of the situation, as reflected by the reports he received on this matter, that he wrote to the Galatians the most stern of his preserved letters. Since he himself had founded the churches in the province of Galatia, they were especially dear to his heart, and their apostasy caused him so much grief that no effort seemed too great to rectify the existing evil. This commentary favors the later date, about A.D. 58.

At about the same time, while Paul's heart was full of the subject of righteousness by faith, he seems also to have written his letter to the Romans (see AA 373, 383).

The Epistle to the Romans contains a number of clear statements concerning the time when it was written. Paul planned to continue his work in the west, especially in Spain

(Rom. 15:24, 28), to which country he hoped to go in the near future. However, first he had to make a brief journey to Jerusalem, because he felt honor bound to transmit personally to the poor in Jerusalem the funds he had collected for them in the churches in Greece and Macedonia (vs. 25–27). On his planned journey to Spain he hoped to fulfill one of his desires of many years' standing, by visiting the church of Rome (chs. 1:8–11; 15:23, 24).

The statements concerning Paul's travel plans show clearly that the letter to the Romans was written shortly before his departure from Corinth for Jerusalem. Since Paul left Corinth shortly before the Passover season of the year A.D. 58 (see Acts 20:16), after having spent three months in Greece (v. 3), it may be concluded that the letter to the Romans was written during the early months of A.D. 58. He probably wrote Galatians shortly before, either late in A.D. 57 or early in 58.

The Prison Epistles.—The prison epistles are those to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, and Philemon. That these prison epistles were indeed written during an imprisonment of the apostle is clearly indicated by the following passages: Eph. 6:20; Phil. 1:13, 14; Col. 4:18; Philemon 1, 9.

That the letters to the Ephesians, the Colossians, and Philemon were sent approximately at the same time is evident from the fact that Paul names the same individuals in the various epistles. Paul was sending Tychicus and Onesimus with the letters to Ephesus, Colossae, and Philemon (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7–9). Onesimus was a runaway slave of Philemon who had been converted by Paul during the apostle's imprisonment and who was now ready to return to Philemon, his master at Colossae (Philemon 10, 11). Paul wrote the Epistle to Philemon as a note of recommendation to Onesimus' master.

From the earliest times Rome has been considered as the place from which the prison epistles were dispatched. They usually have been dated in the latter part of the apostle's imprisonment there, since in them he expresses a hope of being released, for which he must have had some reason (Phil. 2:24; Philemon 22). His imprisonment in Rome lasted two years (Acts 28:30), from the spring of A.D. 61 to A.D. 63, according to the chronology of Paul's ministry adopted in this commentary. Therefore Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon can be dated about A.D. 62.

Some scholars assign these epistles to the two years of Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea (probably spring of A.D. 58 to autumn of A.D. 60), or even in an unknown period of imprisonment in Asia Minor. They hold that the tenor of these letters demands a greater geographical proximity between Paul and his addressees than would have been the case if Paul had written them from Rome. These arguments, however, are not very convincing, and the theories of dating the prison epistles either in the Caesarean captivity or another unknown imprisonment of Paul have found little favorable response from New Testament scholars in general.

The letter to the Philippians is probably the last of the prison epistles. It implies that Paul had been in Rome some time, and already had seen considerable fruitage from his labors (see on Phil. 1:12–14). Furthermore, the whole atmosphere of the letter is one of happiness. Apparently Paul expected a favorable outcome of his appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:10–12), which would allow him once more to visit his beloved church in Philippi (Phil. 2:24). At the same time his words leave no doubt in the mind of his readers that an

unfavorable decision would not have found him unprepared (Phil. 1:19, 20, 22–25). It may therefore be concluded that *Philippians* was probably written in A.D. 63.

Hebrews.—The so-called “Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews” differs from the other thirteen Pauline letters in that the text nowhere contains the name of its author. Paul introduces every one of his other known letters with his name (cf. on Rom. 1:1). From early Christian times there has been much discussion as to whether Paul was really the writer of this epistle. The conclusion of this commentary is that while Paul may not himself have phrased the letter to the Hebrews, it contains, nevertheless, his teachings, and so may be counted among his epistles (for a fuller discussion of this problem see *Introduction to the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Vol. VII).

However, accepting Paul as author of *Hebrews* does not solve the problems connected with its place and date of origin. Where the letter was written is not known, although the words, “They of Italy salute you” (Heb. 13:24), though ambiguous, suggest that it originated in Italy.

Concerning the date of *Hebrews* there is an equal amount of uncertainty. Clement of Rome was acquainted with the letter about A.D. 95, for in writing to the Corinthians at that time he quoted Heb. 1:3–14 (Clement *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 36). This proves not only that the letter was known in Rome before the end of the 1st century, but also that its origin must be sought in the apostolic era. In fact, there are evidences that suggest that the epistle was written before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Otherwise it would seem that an author who emphasizes the voidness and unprofitableness of the old covenant and its typical service, as the author of *Hebrews* does, certainly would have pointed to the cessation of the rituals connected with that service if the Temple had already been destroyed. These events, if they had lain in the past, would have underlined the arguments of the author of *Hebrews* so convincingly that he almost certainly would have used them to prove his point. However, since he implies that the Temple service was still being carried on (see ch. 9:6, where “went” is better translated “are going”) and that the old covenant was “ready to vanish away” (ch. 8:13), it appears probable that the Temple had not yet been destroyed when *Hebrews* was written. These considerations make it possible to date the origin of the letter to the *Hebrews* in the lifetime of Paul, whose death occurred about A.D. 67.

The year A.D. 63 has been taken as the date of *Hebrews* and Rome as its place of origin, without prejudice to other dates and places that comport with the pattern of interpretation followed by this commentary. This would place the letter at the close of Paul’s first Roman imprisonment.

The Pastoral Epistles.—The letters to Timothy and Titus are called the “pastoral epistles” because in large measure they are concerned with the duties of church officers, and with the problems of church administration. In this sense they can be called the earliest church manuals. They are addressed to two of Paul’s younger fellow workers. It seems clear that they originate from the time of the apostle’s ministry following his first imprisonment in Rome (see pp. 30, 183–185). Since this part of Paul’s life is not included in the Acts, little is known concerning his experiences and journeys during that time.

How long a period Paul’s last journeys covered is not known. However, it is quite certain that his life ended under Nero in Rome. Since Nero died in A.D. 68, Paul’s death cannot be dated later, and may have occurred the previous year. His last imprisonment, which probably continued through one winter (2 Tim. 4:21), therefore may be dated A.D.

66–67. If Paul first came to Rome in A.D. 61, his two-year imprisonment would have ended in A.D. 63. This leaves about three years for his last journeys, A.D. 63–66.

Since Paul had indicated in his prison epistles that he was anxious to see the churches in Asia and Macedonia as soon as possible (Phil. 2:24; Philemon 22), it may be assumed that he traveled to those eastern lands shortly after his release. He visited Ephesus, the main city of the province of Asia, before he proceeded to Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3), where the beloved church of Philippi was located. The first letter to Timothy was written after these visits, and so may be dated about a year following his release, probably A.D. 64.

The letter to Titus seems to have been written somewhat later, although it deals with matter very similar to that discussed in the first letter to Timothy. It refers to Paul's work on the island of Crete, which must have taken place also during this last missionary journey (Titus 1:5). However, when the letter was written, Paul had already left the island and had probably gone to Greece, leaving Titus in charge of the work on Crete. Informing Titus of his plans to spend the coming winter at Nicopolis on the western coast of Greece, he requested his young fellow worker to meet him there (ch. 3:12). If a year is allowed for Paul's journey in Asia Minor and Macedonia, and some time for his work in Crete and Greece, his letter to Titus may be dated about A.D. 65.

Paul's further journeys led the apostle probably to Corinth, to Miletus (south of Ephesus), and to Troas (2 Tim. 4:13, 20), and doubtless other cities as well. Troas seems to have been the city where he was again arrested.

After his arrest, probably in A.D. 66, Paul was once more transported to Rome. At the time he wrote his second letter to Timothy, he seems already to have had one hearing but not yet to have been sentenced (2 Tim. 4:17). Although he apparently had little hope of a favorable verdict (v. 6), he seems to have thought that he might spend at least the following winter in Rome (v. 21), possibly because he knew by experience how slowly Roman courts worked. If this expectation proved to be true, and Paul died in A.D. 67, the second letter to Timothy may be dated in the autumn of A.D. 66. As far as is known, this letter brought to a close Paul's literary labors. The extant epistles of Paul cover a period of about 15 years, A.D. 51–66.

²

²Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ac 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.